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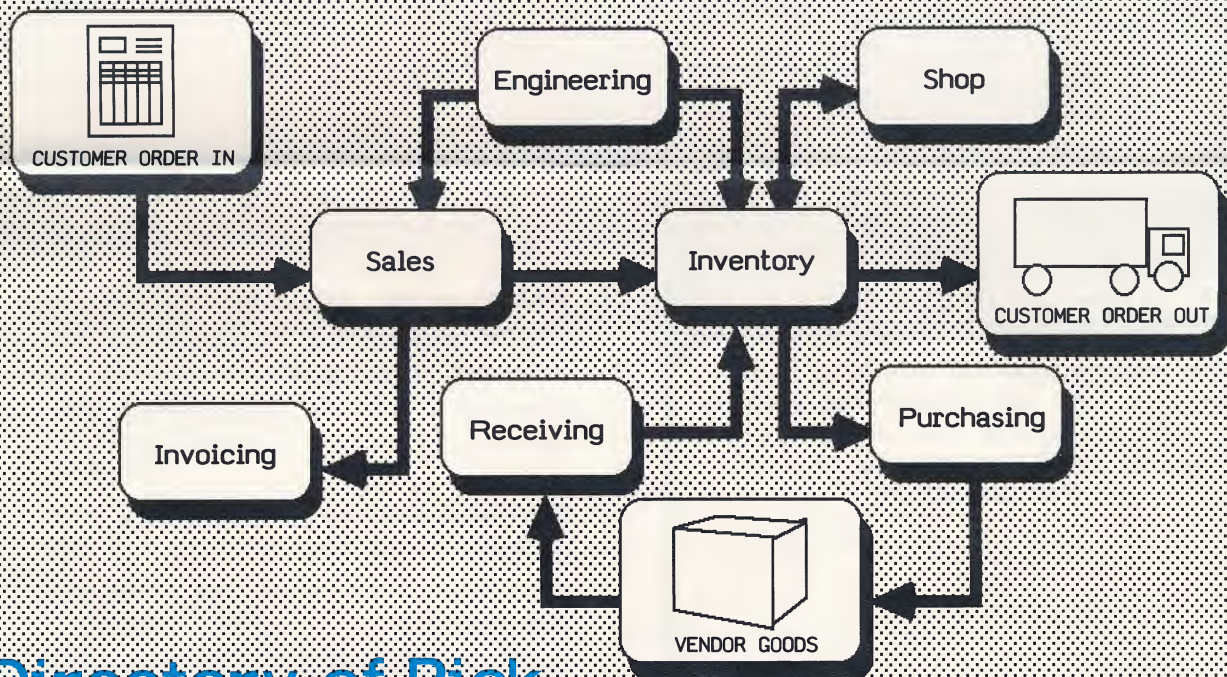
PRODUCT PROFILES

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Issue Number 12

March 1985



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Our Impressions Of The Zebra 750

Another Pick machine, this time a Zebra 750, joined us late last October. We're using the computer as a demonstration unit, as a development machine for commissary control software for jails, and for some miscellaneous data processing in our own office. We had never really intended to write about the Zebra, but eventually decided our readers might like to know how it's performing for us.

When we first went shopping, we had two main criteria. We wanted a small, low-end, inexpensive Pick machine, and we wanted it in a hurry. Because of how and for what we planned to use it, we didn't need a large configuration. Normally only one user, and definitely never more than two at once, would be using the machine. And because of the sudden appearance of a couple of new projects, we needed the computer right away.

Our initial investigation quickly narrowed the choice down to two models: the IBM XT and General Automation's Zebra 750. We finally decided on the 750, primarily because it offered twice the disk capacity, and we didn't think our users could live with the reported slowness of the XT. We ordered the 750 and had it installed and running within three days.

The computer's four months here have revealed a few problems that will need attention. Undoubtedly the worst problem is excessive memory flushing. Apparently, earlier releases of the operating system didn't flush memory to disk soon enough, so that loss of power would leave unwritten disk frames and cause problems like loss of data and group format errors. Unfortunately, General Automation over adjusted in their attempt to correct the problem. The 2.1 release we received (which is a very solid and reliable operating system) flushes *too often*, so that the system is almost constantly writing to disk. That reduces system throughput and can even give the mistaken

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impression that the 750 is slower than the IBM PC. (We ran the standard *Pragma* CPU benchmarks and found the 750 to be a minimum of five times faster than the XT. Our thanks to Raymond Hong of the Port of San Francisco for providing us with XT timings.) Fortunately, GA has identified a fix which it plans to release soon. Mark Pick at GA told us that a sample file-save that takes four hours under 2.1 now only takes an hour and a half with correctly tuned flushing.

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Other minor problems: null values sort last with right justification (a bug that we first encountered when evaluating the now extinct Bantam); the type-ahead buffer seems too small for high volume data entry tasks where clerks are typing nonstop; and noisy fans.

Our model is actually the 752, which goes for \$9,950 suggested retail and uses five megabyte disk cartridges for backup. It was the only model actually shipping last October. Now users can pay \$2,400 more and get a cartridge tape unit instead. The tape is probably a better way to go, since the tape cartridges are easier to find, cost less than disk cartridges, and hold much more data.

Despite the problems we've found, we've been very happy with the 750. Both the hardware and software have been very reliable. The machine performs as advertised, and it has enabled us to do all the work we had planned for it. We can confidently recommend this computer. ☐

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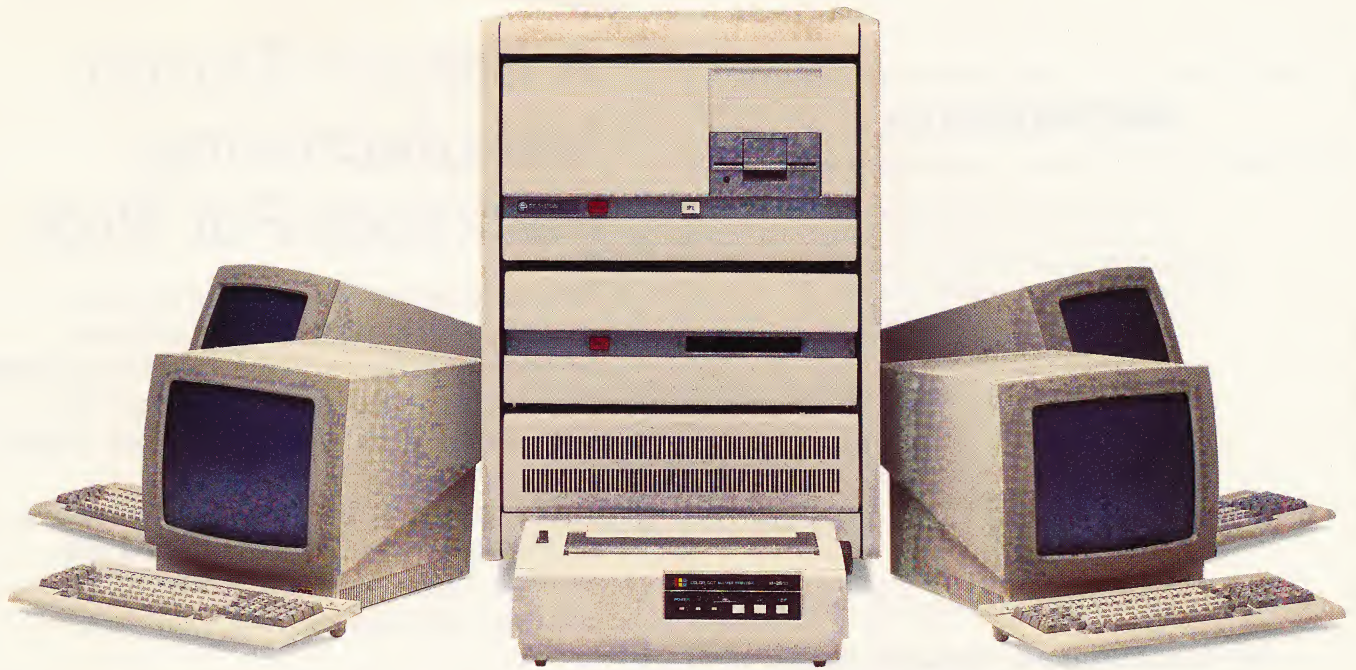
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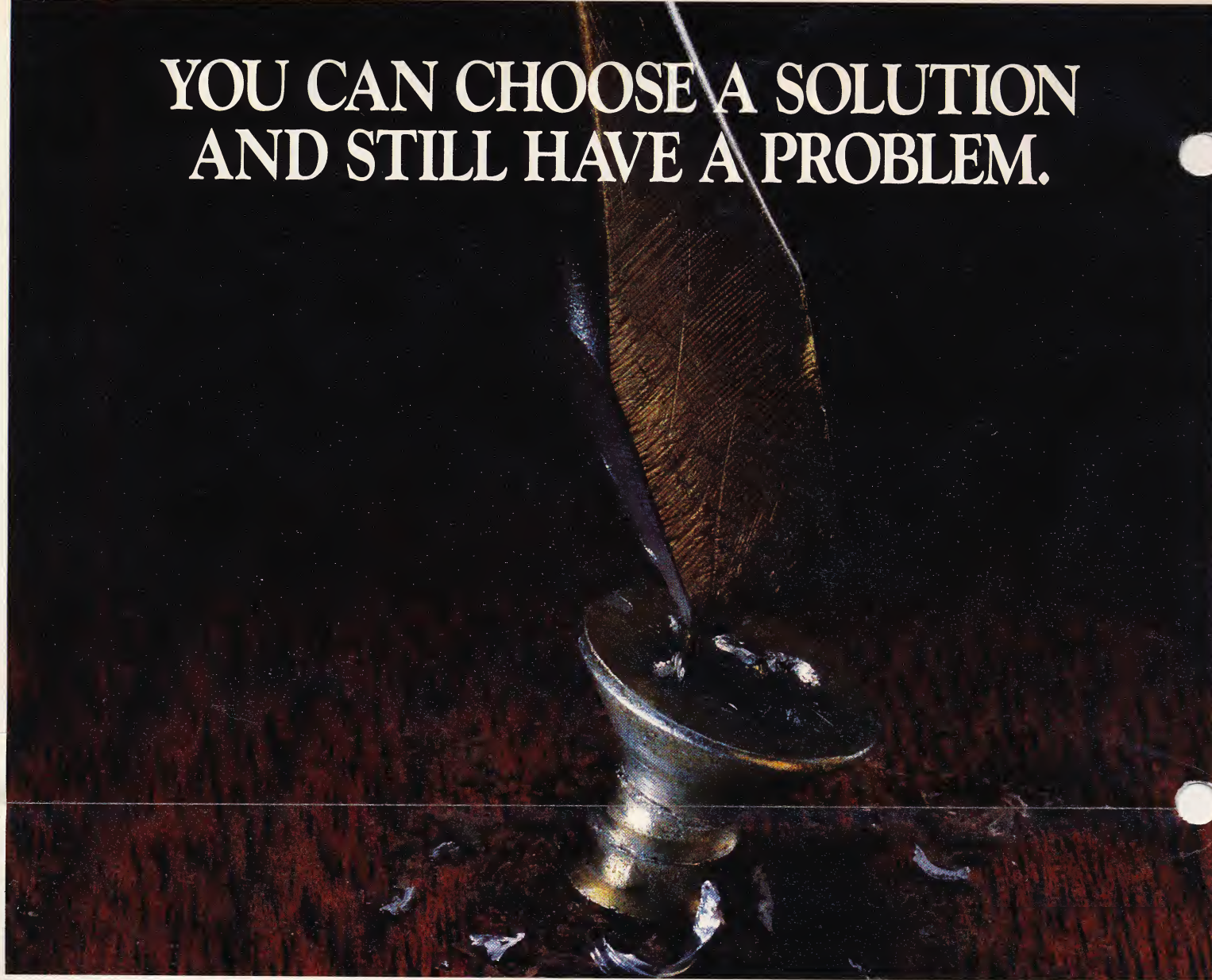
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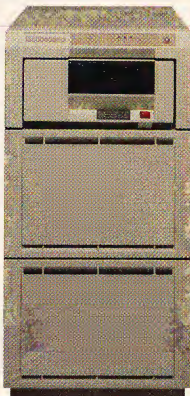


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